# Teacher education towards teacher (and learner) autonomy

## What can be learnt from teacher development practices?

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Teacher education towards teacher and learner autonomy is an ideological, value-laden choice whose purpose and outcomes need to be continuously scrutinised. The authors present three case studies where pre-service student teacher development practices were investigated, and discuss their value and shortcomings as regards their transformative direction. Our experience shows that criticality and role democratisation are difficult to achieve in this context, and that we need to develop further a scholarship of teacher education, as a way to uncover the forces that impinge upon it and to envision new possibilities that best serve the interests of teacher educators, teachers and learners.

### Introduction

This text emerges from three case studies conducted within a pre-service teacher education project in which teacher and learner autonomy are developed in tandem.[1] The project has been running since 1995–96 with foreign language student teachers during their *practicum* year (the 5th year of their teaching degree) and

1. The project has been developed by a team of supervisors from the Department of Methodologies of Education at the Institute of Education and Psychology in our university (the authors and Maria Alfredo Moreira). Flávia supervised the three case studies, which were conducted in 2000–01 by Isabel (Barbosa 2003), Madalena (Paiva 2004) and Isabel Sandra (Fernandes 2004), as part of their MA dissertations.

will be briefly described in section two.[2] In section one we present some assumptions which highlight the ideological nature of our work as teacher educators. The case studies discussed in section three focus on three teacher development practices – lesson observation, supervisory discourse and student teachers' journal writing. A comparative analysis of their value and shortcomings will lead us to section four, where we argue for the need to develop further a scholarship of teacher education towards learner autonomy in schools.

The reason why we put "learner autonomy" in brackets in the title of this chapter is that, although our approach to teacher education is directly aimed at promoting pedagogy for autonomy in schools, the studies we are about to report focus *primarily* on teacher development processes rather than on learner development processes. This is a common paradox of research into teacher education, and it certainly limits our ability to understand how teaching and learning relate to each other. The opposite happens with a lot of research on learner autonomy, where issues of teacher development often remain obscured. Integrating both foci into research will certainly enhance our knowledge of what pedagogy for autonomy entails.

## Promoting teacher and learner autonomy: ideals and possibilities

Teaching and teacher education are political and moral endeavours that reproduce and/or challenge the social order at any given historical moment. Our own choice as teacher educators *to articulate teacher and learner development into a common framework towards an ideal view of education as liberation and empowerment* is meant to be transformative rather than reproductive.

This choice is markedly *ideological* in the sense that we are both limited by the dominant historical and structural forces that impinge upon our personal and professional being *and* committed to challenging those forces, finding spaces for manoeuvre and making education more rational and just. As Kemmis puts it (1999:

**2.** Our university offers FL teaching degrees (5 years) with a *practicum* year (5th year) after which students can become full teachers in lower and upper secondary schools. The *practicum* takes place in a local school and is supervised by two supervisors (school/university). The university supervisor is a teacher of FL Teaching Methodology (as in our case) or a member of the Languages Department. We supervise students from three language teaching degrees: Portuguese–English, English–German, and Portuguese–German. In these cases, they have four supervisors (two for each subject). School supervisors follow the student teachers' work on a daily basis, whereas university supervisors have weekly seminars with the student teachers at the university and observe a minimum of three lessons per student during the year. Institutional regulations do not prescribe any particular approach to supervision. Many supervisors have no specialised training in supervision and there is no formal evaluation of supervisory practices, which can vary a lot.

104), our choice has been, together with all those who share a transformative stance towards education, "to affirm our role as creators of human history", a choice that is fraught with dilemmas and never fully accomplished.

There has not been much research on how teacher education can promote a pedagogy for autonomy in the school context (see the review undertaken by Benson 2001). Our experience has shown us, however, that a *reflective approach* to teacher development offers the possibility of enhancing teacher *and* learner autonomy as interrelated phenomena, provided that the link is intentionally established (see Vieira et al. 2002, 2004). This means that reflective teacher education should involve teachers in *action-based inquiry into the development of pedagogy for autonomy* in schools.

We are aware of the ambiguities surrounding the word "reflective" and of the different interests it may serve (see Kemmis 1999; Smyth 1997; Tom 1985; Vieira & Marques 2002; Zeichner & Tabachnick 1991). The same is true of the word "autonomy" when this refers to either teachers or learners (see Benson 2001; Sinclair et al. 2000). Within our framework, teacher autonomy is seen as a corollary of *critical reflectivity* and can be broadly defined as *willingness and ability to manage constraints within a vision of education as liberation and empowerment*. This view of education requires the development of pedagogy for autonomy in schools, broadly defined as any context-sensitive approach that aims at *moving the learner closer to the learning process and content*, by enhancing conditions that increase motivation to learn, interdependent relationships, discourse power, ability to learn and to manage learning, and a critical attitude towards teaching and learning (Vieira 2003: 224).

Given the social and personal constraints on the development of teacher and learner autonomy, we must emphasise the importance of *hope* in teacher education and school pedagogy. As Van Manen puts it (1990: 123), "to hope is to believe in possibilities". In our work with teachers we believe that it is possible to move away from education as *reproduction* towards education as *transformation*. However, this transition is never radical or finished, clear or easy. It is rather a never-ending, chaotic and highly uncertain process whereby educators resist pressures to conform and try to find a voice in their communities, but still have to respond to various forms of *authority*, like educational tradition, established norms and routines, institutional requirements and bureaucracy, accountability standards, assessment systems, syllabi and textbooks, time constraints, and so on, not to mention the hegemonic power of political and academic discourses that are often built on the margin of educators' interests. Therefore, moving towards education as transformation means swimming sometimes (more) *with* and other times (more) *against* the tide, without losing sight of the ideal we defend.

Becoming action researchers and developing a scholarship of teacher education has helped us measure and shorten the distance between possibilities (what education can be at a particular moment) and ideals (what it should be), although there is always the risk of self-delusion in judging the quality of what we do on the basis of our personal histories and conceptual lenses – after all, we may be unable to critically understand and reconstruct our thought and action, and even unaware of our incapacity to do so.

## Integrating teacher and learner autonomy: a pre-service teacher development project

### *The context*

Even though our national language education policies include autonomy as a learning goal and there have been promising local initiatives in schools, we might say that the culture of schooling is fraught with conflicting rationalities, and the development of learner autonomy is hardly a reality in Portugal. As one of us wrote elsewhere to sum up the present situation (Vieira 2003: 221), most school practices are not learning-centred and various factors seem to affect teachers' willingness to experiment with alternative approaches. Among those factors we can point out the following: the weight of a transmissive and individualistic pedagogical tradition, the lack of appropriate teacher development programmes, the government's top-down approach to innovation, the contradictions between reform principles and the demands of the system, and the increasing amount of bureaucracy associated with accountability in a progressively decentralised school system.

As far as pre-service teacher education is concerned, the situation is also problematic: there is a mismatch between practice and political or academic discourses, curricula are still too theoretical and detached from schools, investment in the qualification of supervisors has been scarce, student teachers tend to be socialised into the dominant school culture, and the opportunities for university–school collaboration during the *practicum* period are largely wasted. Moreover, we are currently undergoing a major curriculum reform in teacher education due to the

Declaration of Bologna, which does not seem very promising in terms of improving the quality of pre-service professional development[3].

Our main question about pre-service teacher education is, "how far is it preparing teachers to transform rather than reproduce dominant practices, to challenge rather than conform to given situational constraints?" (Vieira 2003: 222). The project and the case studies that we describe below can be interpreted as an attempt to answer this question.

*The project*

The assumption that inquiry is at the heart of pedagogy and professional development has greatly inspired our work with student teachers at the University of Minho. As supervisors, we have tried *to enhance reflective teacher development through inquiry into pedagogy for autonomy in schools*. In doing so, we have also tried to promote *our own* development through inquiry into our practice as reflective teacher educators.

Our project was set up in 1995–96 and it aims at promoting our student teachers' critical reflectivity by helping them to: (1) problematise the contexts of teaching and teacher development, (2) inquire into pedagogical theories and practices, (3) promote learning-centred pedagogy, and (4) value self-direction and collaboration in professional development. These aims are enacted through small-scale action research projects conducted by the student teachers in one of their classes.

Action research was first experimented with by one of our colleagues for her Master's degree with one group of student teachers (see Moreira 2001), and was incorporated into this project because it enhances an intentional link between teacher *and* learner centredness. We define it broadly as *systematic inquiry into practice so as to improve the quality of teaching and learning*, where quality is equated with *what makes education (more) rational, just and satisfactory.* Parker (1997: 39) points out that action research is "the means by which reflective teaching can become properly *critical*", especially because it favours *theory-generation* rather than theory-application, and is concerned with *ends* – the value-framework – of education.

3. Pre-service teacher education programmes in Portugal are of two main kinds: integrated (as in our university, where students learn educational subjects from the first year of their teaching degrees) or sequential (where students can do teacher training after completing three years of subject-related education). The teaching *practicum* can be condensed into the final year (at universities) or dispersed during the programme for shorter periods of time (at schools of education). The current reform will lead to the adoption of a sequential model where teacher education becomes a post-graduate course of two years. The organisation of the *practicum* in still not clear, but it will be shortened.

Every year we help student teachers design and implement action research projects, starting from their own pedagogical concerns or interests, which usually arise from a diagnosis of their students' learning problems. The research projects may focus on particular skills or on broader issues like motivation or indiscipline. Whatever the topic chosen, we focus particularly on how pedagogical choices can foster learning-centredness, a concept we operationalise around four main notions – reflection, experimentation, regulation and negotiation:

*Reflection* – learners should have the opportunity to reflect upon language and language learning processes so as to develop their awareness of how language works and how they can deal with language learning. Reflection should promote linguistic awareness (of formal, pragmatic and sociocultural aspects of language), language processing awareness (of how one reads, writes, interacts, etc.), self-awareness (of learning styles, study habits, personal needs and expectations, etc.), task awareness (of the rationale, goals and procedures involved in language learning tasks), and context awareness (of situational factors that may affect language learning in schools, for example syllabi, textbooks, pedagogical roles and discourse, assessment procedures, etc.).

*Experimentation* – learners should have the opportunity to try out learning strategies (in class and outside class) that help them discover their own learning preferences, identify and solve learning problems, set personal goals, self-evaluate learning processes and outcomes … that is, they should learn how to learn by experiencing a wide range of socio-affective and (meta)cognitive learning strategies.

*Regulation* – learners should have the opportunity to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning so as to develop their willingness and ability to self-direct. Regulation entails both reflection and experimentation (see above).

*Negotiation* – learners should have the opportunity to interact freely, take an active part in the construction of knowledge and pedagogical decision making, develop cooperative attitudes and skills, and create positive interdependence relationships among themselves and with others.

These aspects are taken as important dimensions of pedagogy for autonomy and are discussed with our students in the year before the *practicum*, in the FL Teaching Methodology course. When they get to schools, they are usually willing to explore them in practice, but after a while they tend to lean back towards more traditional stances, mainly due to the socialising force of the school culture and the need to "survive" as novice teachers. Our role is to provide alternatives, guidance and feedback, but most of all we strive to help them uncover and manage constraints, maintain motivation and energy, and recognise the importance of their role as educators. The participation of school supervisors in this process is crucial and we do our best to encourage communication and mutual support. However,

time constraints, lack of training in supervision and/or lack of familiarity with our approach often result in poor co-operation, which is an important hindrance to the accomplishment of our goals.

All projects are documented in action research journals where reflective writing plays a major role. Student teachers are encouraged to write regularly about their practice, especially about action research strategies, with a focus on the justifications and implications of their choices. Oral reflection with us takes place mostly during pre-/post-observation 'conferences' (sessions) where action research strategies are discussed and lessons are analysed. In these conferences, we try to encourage critical reflection on/for action rather than taking an evaluative stance. This usually means, among other things, that "asking questions" becomes as important as (and sometimes even more important than) "giving answers". The action research projects are formally evaluated by each student teacher at the end of the year, and we also evaluate the approach on the basis of information collected through lesson observation, questionnaires and the journals.

This approach to supervision is not representative of supervisory approaches at our institution. This limits its impact and means that it tends to be resisted by the student teachers initially. Although they eventually acknowledge its benefits and even advocate that it should be extended, they also feel it is unfair that they should go through the demands and difficulties of action research whereas others do not, knowing they have no choice and no guarantee that their effort will be properly rewarded in their final mark as compared with the others. Unlike in in-service teaching situations where action research is teacher-initiated, here it is "supervisor-initiated", and it takes some time before student teachers acknowledge the value of an inquiry-based approach to pedagogy.

It should be clear, though, that our goal is *not* to train action researchers. Action research, like other strategies, is essentially a *means* to promote teacher and learner autonomy, and our major goal is that student teachers learn to *stand for and explore ideals for education*. This goes hand in hand with developing a critical view of educational contexts by uncovering constraints and dilemmas and learning to deal with uncertainty in complex situations. Fundamentally, it entails a commitment to self-questioning and finding one's position and voice in a world of conflicting values and rationalities. As Barnett (2004) puts it, the major challenge for pedagogy in higher education today "is not one of knowing but of *being*". This is certainly true for the pedagogy of teacher education.

Going back to our question above, how far is this project preparing teachers to transform rather than reproduce dominant practices, to challenge rather than conform to given situational constraints? Far enough, we should say, because the gains have been quite significant over the years (see Fernandes 2004; Marques et al., 2001; Moreira 1999, 2004; Moreira et al. 1999a, 1999b; Paiva 2004); not far enough, we

must add, because there is still a lot to be done to shorten the distance between our accomplishments and our ideal. Possibilities still need to be explored …

## Investigating teacher development practices: lesson observation, supervisory discourse and journal writing

### *Three case studies*

The three empirical studies we will now briefly present focus on three teacher development practices within the project: lesson observation (Madalena's study), supervisory discourse in observation conferences (Isabel's study), and journal writing (Sandra's study). Why did we decide to investigate these practices? Within our approach to supervision, we have always assumed that they can play a crucial role in supporting student teachers' efforts to explore pedagogy for autonomy while developing their own critical reflectivity. However, we felt we needed to know more about their value and shortcomings as regards that role.

The three studies were carried out in 2000–01 with one group of three student teachers and their EFL supervisors. Madalena was the university supervisor, and her student teachers' action research project was focussed on promoting their students' autonomy by making them "less dependent on the teacher and more dependent on themselves". They were thus interested in changing pedagogical roles in the classroom.

The studies were developed within an interpretative paradigm and two main sources of evidence were used: participants' *perspectives* (through questionnaires, reflective records or interviews) and participants' *discourse* (oral or written, analysed with categories defined according to research foci). Table 1 presents the focus, objectives, common gains and methodological limitations of the studies.

**Table 1.** Case studies: focus & objectives, gains & limitations

| | *Focus & objectives* | *Main gains & limitations* |
|---|---|---|
| *1. Lesson observation* | *Collaboration in lesson observation within an ect AR projaimed at promoting learner autonomy*<br>– Develop collaborative observation practices within the STs' project<br>– Understand the role of collaboration in the (re)construction of personal theories and supervisory roles<br>– Evaluate the impact of the experience on participants' personal and professional development | *Common gains (CS 1,2,3):*<br>– Enhancement of collaboration in the (re)construction of supervisory knowledge and action<br>– Better understanding of the value and shortcomings of collaborative observation, supervisory discourse and journal writing in reflective teacher education towards learner autonomy |
| *2. Supervisory discourse* | *University S's discourse reflectivity in conferences within the same AR project*<br>– Characterise the university S's discourse in observation conferences: function (reflective processes), coverage (topics of reflection), and involvement of STs<br>– Compare discourse practices with S and STs' representations about those practices | – Stimulus for further research and practice: how can these practices better enhance critical reflectivity within our supervision project?<br>– Personal and professional development of the researchers<br>*Common limitations (CS 1,2,3)*<br>– **Focus on one local experience**<br>– **Subjectivity of data analysis** |
| *3. Reflective writing* | *STs' discourse criticality in AR journals within their project*<br>– Understand STs' representations of reflection in professional development<br>– Characterise STs' reflective entries in AR journals: function (reflective processes) and coverage (topics of reflection) | – **Limited account of the dynamics of interactive reflection**<br>– Problems inherent to participant and non-participant research (subject–object relationship) |

S – supervisor; STs – student teachers; AR – action research; CS – case study

### *Study 1 – lesson observation*

The benefits associated with lesson observation in teacher development contexts are widely documented in the literature (see Hopkins 1993; Vieira 1993a, 1993b; Wajnryb 1992; Wragg 1999). As observation brings about reflection, it may act as a stimulus for change and empowerment for both the observed and the observer. However, it can also become a threatening and/or acritical activity where in-built biases and hierarchical power relationships constrain the development of self-discovery, self-esteem, and self-agency. Collaborative observation as a joint commitment to support teacher and learner autonomy should entail a dialogic approach

to supervision, and we were interested in understanding the extent to which it can enhance role democratisation in a supervisory setting.

In this study, Madalena conducted a set of pre/post-observation tasks with her student teachers, based on classroom episodes from their action research project on developing learner autonomy, either through direct observation or through video recordings. She collected information on the student teachers' views of observation through questionnaires and reflective records, analysed a mid-year post-observation conference with a focus on the participants' roles in discourse, and asked the school supervisor to write a final evaluative comment on the initiative implemented.

*Study 2 – supervisory discourse*

Observation conferences highlight the role of interactive discourse in promoting professional development. There is not much research, however, on how university supervisors' discourse fosters or hampers the quality of teacher reflection. Since a very significant part of their work with student teachers takes place in these encounters, examining what they *say* is a way to understand what they *do* as teacher educators. It is also through discourse that supervisory styles are manifested, and the level of collaboration in discourse will influence the way student teachers develop their sense of professional direction (Glickman et al. 2001; Waite 1995, 1999). The more dialogic the interaction is, the more chances there are for student teachers and supervisors alike to grow.

Within her study, Isabel recorded and analysed six observation conferences in Madalena's work with the student teachers, corresponding to three observation cycles (pre-/post-observation sessions). She focussed on Madalena's reflectivity in terms of discourse function (reflective processes), coverage (topics of reflection), and involvement of the student teachers in interaction. Information on the participants' representations of discourse was collected in a final questionnaire and an interview with Madalena.

*Study 3 – journal writing*

Written reflection, namely journal writing, can be a powerful tool to enhance professional critical competences in complex situations (see Davis 1996; Fenwick 2001; Holly 1997; Knowles & Cole 2000; Van Manen 1990). However, as in any other approach that envisages transformation rather than resignation, written reflection needs to be constantly scrutinised in terms of what it means in practice, why it should be promoted and for what purposes, how it is done and on behalf of whose interests. Investigating student teachers' writing in reflective journals can help us understand its personal and social significance, especially the role of

uncertainty and constraints in the reconstruction of personal and professional roles and identities.

Sandra collected Madalena's student teachers' action research journals and analysed them, focussing on discourse criticality in terms of function (reflective processes) and coverage (topics). Information on the participants' views on the role of reflection in professional development was collected through questionnaires.

The decision to gather all the information in the same setting was never intended to evaluate the quality of the participants' performance. It was essentially a matter of taking the opportunity to explore the potential of a multi-perspective analysis of the same experience. This strategic decision was soon recognised to be an important step towards a more solid and realistic vision of our work, and although we cannot generalise the findings to other situations, we believe that they illuminate the value and shortcomings of the practices under study and indicate directions for the improvement of the supervisory project as a whole.

*Value and shortcomings of practices*

Table 2 presents the perceived value indicators and facilitating factors associated with the practices investigated. Value indicators emerged from the research findings, whereas most factors were identified on the basis of our interpretation of results, informal observation and knowledge of the *practicum* setting. The same applies to Table 3 below with regard to shortcomings and constraining factors.

The value indicators on the left-hand column can be read as both *outcomes of* and *conditions for* the transformation of dominant practices of supervision and pedagogy. The three major gains emerging from them – *inquiry*, *participation* and *growth* – seem to be facilitated by a variety of factors (see right-hand column) which refer mostly to *our conceptual framework as teacher educators*, but also to the *student teachers' commitment* to professional development and the *positive interpersonal relationships* among participants. Although we cannot establish a cause-effect relationship between these three aspects and the value indicators found, we believe that they play a crucial role in the integrated development of teacher and learner autonomy.

These results were not a surprise, as they confirmed our previous impressions and expectations. From a critical perspective, finding evidence of shortcomings was more important as it allowed us to *re-question* practices whose value can be easily taken –for granted.

**Table 2.** Value of practices, and facilitating factors

| | **Indicators of value** | **Facilitating factors** |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Lesson observation** | – positive atmosphere, team spirit<br>– positive attitudes towards observation<br>– development of observation skills<br>– participation in reflection and decision-making<br>– creative generation of ideas<br>– sense of self-direction<br>– involvement of school S<br>– reflective stance towards supervision | *Common factors (CS 1,2,3):*<br>– Good interpersonal relationships<br>– AR approach to teaching<br>– Situated/practice-oriented reflection<br>– Supervision framework of reference (reflective teacher development and pedagogy for autonomy)<br>– STs' commitment to professional development |
| **2. Supervisory discourse** | – reflection about concerns beyond the immediacy of practice<br>– openness to sharing ideas and feelings<br>– co-construction of knowledge<br>– pedagogical innovation focussed on teacher and learner autonomy<br>– reflective stance towards supervision | ***Other factors:***<br>– University S's commitment to a collaborative approach (CS 1, 2)<br>– Co-operation of school S (CS 1, 2)<br>– Power of writing as inquiry (CS 3) |
| **3. Reflective writing** | – inquiry into learner autonomy and teacher development processes<br>– openness to complexity, uncertainty, positive conflict and change<br>– pro-active attitude towards constraints<br>– regulation of feelings and motivations<br>– finding a voice and a meta-language<br>– reflective stance towards supervision | |

S - supervisor; STs – student teachers; AR – action research; CS – case study

Table 3 summarises the main shortcomings found by each study as well as the factors that seem to explain them.

The shortcomings listed in the left-hand column highlight two major limitations of our approach: *(not very high) degree of criticality and of role democratisation*. These interrelated aspects affect the development of critical reflectivity, which depends on both critical abilities and egalitarian reciprocity in interactive discourse. The constraining factors identified in the right-hand column raise some broader issues that seem to have a particularly erosive effect upon teacher development in supervisory contexts, and also a negative impact on our efforts to promote pedagogy for autonomy in schools.

**Table 3.** Shortcomings of practices and constraining factors

| | Indicators of shortcomings | Constraining factors |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Lesson observation | Symmetric participation in collaborative observation is hard to achieve: (a) university S tends to dominate discourse and roles are often unequally distributed; (b) STs' show different degrees of participation; (c) the school S might play a more determining role in interaction | – Asymmetrical status and background knowledge of participants<br>– Expectations as regards roles<br>– Lack of a collaborative culture<br>– Diversity of supervisory approaches<br>– Personality traits of participants<br>– Time/space – limited contact between university S and STs |
| 2.Supervisory discourse | Reflective moves rarely reach a high level of criticality: (a) processes of theory and practice reconstruction are often absent; (b) an explicit focus on pedagogical assumptions is scarce; (c) reflection about the contexts of teaching and learning is not frequent | – Partial mismatch between practices and representations (which are more positive)<br>– No systematic regulation of discourse quality<br>– Need to attend to STs' priorities with a focus on problem-solving<br>– Time constraints (vs. long agendas) |
| 3. Reflective writing | Reflective moves rarely reach a high level of criticality: (a) problematisation of macro-contexts of practice is scarce; (b) assumptions and moral implications of pedagogic options are often absent; (c) no evidence is found of a cyclical and dialogical use of written reflections Problems of expression and personal writing styles sometimes affect clarity and coherence of ideas | – Lack of a culture of (and quality criteria for) written reflection<br>– Limited reflective competences<br>– Limited awareness of the power of writing as inquiry into theories and practices<br>– No systematic feedback from Ss on journal reflectivity<br>– Concerns with assessment, self-image, face, strategic survival<br>– Perception of AR journals as a product (vs. development tool)<br>– Shortage of time to invest in writing |

S - supervisor; STs – student teachers; AR – action research

Criticality has been discussed in the literature about levels and dimensions of reflection, and some typologies have been suggested to help teachers and teacher educators expand professional reflection to a critical 'stage' (see Jay and Johnson 2002; Ward & McCotter 2004). The problem, however, cannot be reduced to the availability of a typology, no matter how useful it might be in creating a framework for reflection.

Even when reflection is valued by supervisors, as in our case, the beginning teachers' lack of experiential knowledge *as teachers* usually requires them to focus

on survival strategies at a rather technical level; moreover, their experiential background *as learners* often hinders reflective development, for although they start off with a pro-active attitude towards the development of learner autonomy, they are rapidly socialised into reproducing the dominant values and practices they know best, thus adopting a rather passive, low-risk stance. Therefore, both past and previous experience (as learners/teachers) can hamper their ability to challenge established practices. If we believe experience to be the touchstone of professional development, then we must acknowledge the huge gap to be bridged between the kind of experience student teachers *bring* to the training situation, *see* in schools and tend to *reproduce*, and the kind of experience that we the supervisors would like them to *value* and *strive for*. This we might call the *experience dilemma*.

The quality of supervisory counselling has a determining role here, and can always be improved, but the *evaluative function* of supervision often undermines criticality in at least two subtle ways: student teachers may not be willing or feel at ease to open up, share dilemmas, reveal weaknesses, and assume their own views (even if they *seem* to be willing / at ease); or they may feel compelled to respond according to the supervisor's agenda as a strategy to avoid confrontation and win his/her sympathy (even if they *seem* to respond from their own choice). These kinds of attitudes are, to a certain extent, legitimate, and the supervisor has no easy way out of what we might call the *support-evaluation dilemma*. On the other hand, if reflection is constrained by a perceived threat to face, self-esteem and pro-activeness, this means that public reflection (oral or written) may not be a totally reliable source for judging student teachers' criticality.

The above problems necessarily affect role democratisation, also a major topic in the literature on pedagogical supervision. Waite, for example, advocates a dialogic approach whereby "participants are free, indeed encouraged, to question anyone's assumptions. This is done within a relationship of mutual trust and reciprocity" (1999: 244). There are, however, severe cultural and personal constraints on a balanced distribution of power in supervisory relationships.

In reflective environments where equal participation is valued, the supervisors' *position of authoritative power* still requires that they adjust their supervisory style to the student teachers' degree of willingness and ability to assume responsibility. In (too?) many situations, they need to adopt a directive informative style rather than a collaborative one, even though that is not the choice they would ideally make. There is often a tension between the emancipatory goals of teacher education and the student teachers' *readiness to make choices that best serve their students' interests*, or between the tenets of reflective teacher education and the role of the supervisor as someone who is supposed to *teach how to teach*. As supervisors are expected to be reliable and supportive, student teachers often expect them to provide solutions to urgent problems on the basis of their expertise. In fact, the

supervisor often acts like a model: a model for how you should (not) reason about teaching and learning, a model for what you should (not) value in education, a model for what you should (not) strive for in educational settings. In a nutshell, *a model for "the reflective professional"*. This implicit modelling is necessary in order to be coherent ("practise what you preach"), but it can also hamper (often unintentionally) the student teachers' choices by "imposing" a view of education that can hardly be contested but is difficult to understand fully and even more difficult to put into practice. The experience dilemma mentioned above is reinforced by the *conceptual gulf* between the supervisor and the student teacher, which may generate acritical compliance, fear to frustrate expectations, insecurity, silent resistance or open confrontation, which in turn may result in either a *false role democratisation* (everyone participates in accordance with the supervisor's agenda and frame of reference) or *role conflict* (in this case, passive or adversarial roles are often judged as inappropriate but left unexamined.

As regards the two interrelated aspects we have been discussing – criticality and role democratisation – there is certainly a *hidden curriculum* in teacher education that calls for further investigation. Or perhaps student teachers and supervisors need to keep it hidden in order to preserve their selves and withstand uncertainty, conflict, or psychological pressure.

If we compare the facilitating and constraining factors from Tables 2 and 3, a major difference can be signalled: the former derive mainly from our choices as teacher educators, whereas the latter refer mostly to the dominant culture of supervision and teacher development. This takes us back to the ideological nature of the approach we have developed: our action as teacher educators is somewhere between how things *can be* and how things *should be*. Envisioning possibilities is the topic of the next section.

### *Envisioning possibilities*

The exploratory process of striving for our educational ideals and re-finding a "language of possibility" (Aronowitz & Giroux 1993: 149) requires that we see reflective approaches not only as *empowerment tools*, but also as *tools with power* to serve multiple and even conflicting ends, depending on how they unfold. Practices that are meant to be powerful tools to enhance democratic and critical development processes need to be subjected to continuous scrutiny as a means to uncover not only *how* and *why* those processes are valuable but also *by* and *for whom* they are promoted. As reflective teacher educators, we need to adopt an attitude of constant surveillance and even a healthy scepticism about our personal theories and practices, including "a due measure of self-doubt" (Barnett 2004).

The main limitations of our approach seem to have to do with criticality and role democratisation, which are interdependent phenomena. Our student teachers find themselves in a paradoxical position: they should feel empowered to make decisions, but these are constrained by our agenda to promote autonomy in schools, and by our role as evaluators of their willingness and ability to do so. Moreover, even when they strive to do it, their sense of direction is strongly affected by their sense of powerlessness as regards the school culture and their lack of teaching experience. In our efforts to "teach them how to teach", we may be imposing a view of education rather than helping them build their own.

The struggle between the ideal and the possible seems to point to a clear direction: the urge *to develop a culture of significant possibility*, which involves the interplay between conceptual frameworks, personal beliefs, (inter)personal will and choices, situational circumstances, and the historical forces of dominant cultures.

Our studies represent a step forward in envisioning what might be *significantly possible* in our working context: to enhance collaboration and discourse as empowering practices. Practical measures to do this have been worked out by the team and include more self-/co-regulation of supervisory discourse, more collaborative work on journal entries, and more co-operation with/from school supervisors. But underneath and beyond practical solutions, which are always context-sensitive and context-bound, lies the most important gain from our inquiry: *a heightened awareness of where we stand as regards the direction we take, and also a deeper sense of our responsibility as teacher educators*.

## Developing a scholarship of teacher education towards pedagogy for autonomy

If pre-service teacher education is to have a transformative effect upon schools, it is not enough to equip student teachers with vast amounts of specialist and pedagogical knowledge or teaching techniques. Rather, it is urgent to encourage the development of critical competences that enable active participation in the construction of a democratic society, and this will only be possible if student teachers become involved in challenging and reconstructing established practices in schools. We believe that supervisory strategies can support this goal by fostering their willingness and ability to manage constraints, within a vision of education as liberation and empowerment. This vision necessarily entails teacher and learner autonomy as an educational goal.

In order to enhance teacher and learner autonomy, we need to develop a scholarship of teacher education that is *socially relevant and morally defensible*. Two major goals of this scholarship might be (1) uncovering the forces that reduce the scope and impact of teacher education practices, and (2) envisioning ways to con-

struct local practices of significant possibility. The case studies we have presented are just one example of how this kind of scholarship can be promoted, through the multi-perspective analysis of experience, by supervisors who share the same conceptual framework and work in the same team.

As we said in the introduction, research in the autonomy field has tended to focus either on the teacher or on the learner. We certainly need to inquire further into how teacher and learner autonomy relate to each other, so as to understand the full meaning of the expression *pedagogy for autonomy,* where *autonomy* refers to both participants, and not just to the learner. In this approach, teachers and learners become analysts of their own practice and critical informers of the educational community. A third goal of a scholarship of teacher education would then be (3) supporting teachers and learners in undertaking and disseminating school-based inquiry into pedagogy for autonomy.

Whatever we do to develop the kind of scholarship we advocate here, it will always face obstacles, especially as teacher education is often undervalued in the academic milieu. Therefore, the direction of teacher education also depends on the way teacher educators position themselves in their working places: how far are they (we) willing and able to transform rather than reproduce dominant practices, to challenge rather than conform to given situational constraints?

## Notes

**4.** These student teachers were doing their *practicum* in English and German at a secondary school. The case studies did nor involve German, as action research was only used for English, as part of our project.

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